DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 449 575 EA 030 863

AUTHOR	Obiakor, Festus E.
TITLE	Redefining "Good" Schools: Quality and Equity in Education. Position Paper #1.
PUB DATE	2000-07-09
NOTE	28p.; Distinguished Visiting Professor Presentation (University of West Virginia, Morgantown, WV, July 9, 2000).
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Educational Quality; Elementary Secondary Education; *Equal Education; Public Schools; *Racial Differences; *School Culture; *Socioeconomic Influences; *Teaching Models

ABSTRACT

The "good" school phenomenon has led to the deceptive self-aggrandizement of students, parents, teachers, and administrators. Good schools have been poorly defined to exclude equity, and this diminishes their role in the uplift of society's culture. Schools have been viewed as good even when they fail to meet cultural, linguistic, racial, and socioeconomic needs of students. This trend must be reversed if general and special educators are to respond to current demographic changes. This paper discusses the qualities of a "good" school and uses cases to describe the good-school phenomenon. Many of these schools cannot survive external scrutiny when evaluated from multidimensional perspectives. Schools are needed to manifest human realities in a practical way, and they must be places where teachers, principals, and administrators are prepared to move beyond tradition to expose all students to life's realities. (Contains 30 references.) (DFR)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

EA

ED 449 575

Running Head: REDEFINING "GOOD" SCHOOLS

Redefining "Good" Schools:

Quality and Equity in Education

Festus E. Obiakor, Ph.D.

Professor

Department of Exceptional Education

University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

Milwaukee, WI 53202

(414) 229-4666 (W)

(414) 332-3278 (H)

fobiakor@uwm.edu (Email)

Position Paper #1

Distinguished Visiting Professor Presentation

University of West Virginia, Morgantown, WV

July 9, 2000

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

F. Obiakor

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

EA 030863

Abstract

The "good" school phenomenon has led to the deceptive self-aggrandizement of students, parents, teachers, and administrators. "Good" schools have been poorly defined to exclude equity. Logically, this diminishes their role in the uplift of society's culture. Schools have been viewed as "good" even when they fail to meet cultural, linguistic, racial, and socioeconomic needs of students. This trend must be reversed in this new millennium if general and special educators must respond to current demographic changes. The question then becomes, "What really is a 'good' school?" In this paper, I respond to this intriguing question and use cases to discuss the "good" school phenomenon.

Redefining "Good" Schools:

Quality and Equity in Education

We need "good" schools for all of our nation's children. Interestingly, the "good" school phenomenon has overtaken our sense of obligation or decency. We seem to have forgotten that "good" schools are environments that should respond to differences in styles, energies, and strengths that students bring to classrooms. In "good" schools, students from different cultural, racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds are expected to maximize their fullest potential. In such schools, teachers are expected to teach, test, reteach, and retest students in multidimensional, unprejudicial ways. Such schools are expected to prepare students to be productive citizens of the society (Grossman, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Obiakor, 1994). In addition, such schools are supposed to be havens for *good* students, *good* parents, *good* teachers, *good* principals, and *good* school district administrators. Ironically, the *good* school phenomenon has led to a deceptive self-aggrandizement of students, parents, teachers, and administrators. What really is a "good" school? In this paper, I answer the question and use cases to discuss the "good" school phenomenon.

To redefine "good" schools, we must view "culture" as an uncontroversial issue that increases the *goodness* and *quality* of schools (Banks, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Obiakor, 1994). The pervasive theme in this paper is that *good* schools are environments where *all* students maximize their fullest potential. I argue that in this new millennium, schools must address demographic and cultural shifts in powers and paradigms. These shifts inevitably demand that *good* teachers and *good* schools utilize new methods of identification, assessment, categorization, placement, and instruction to deal with the multidimensional needs of *all*

students, in spite of their cultural, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The logical extension is that when identification and assessment are properly done by teachers, they lead to appropriate categories, placements, and instructions (Grossman, 1998; Obiakor, 1994, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c; Obiakor, Schwenn, & Rotatori, 1999).

In redefining "good" schools, I have used cases to explicate classroom realities because they are popular in educational research and pedagogy. Many schools and educators (e.g., Grossman, 1998; Kohl, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Obiakor, 1994; Palmer, 1998; West, 1993) have used cases to tell their stories. Pedagogically, students learn from stories because they relate to real life experiences. In fact, experiences can be instructional whether they are "good" or "bad." In many communities, especially in minority communities, oral tradition has been consistently honored as a respectable form of historical information. According to Denzin (1995), cases "create experiences that embody cultural meaning, and cultural understandings that operate in the 'real' world" (p. 8). They are experiences and self-stories that make up important events in people's lives. Denzin explained that they open "a parallax of discordant voices, visions, and feelings" and "yield to a cacophony of voices demanding to be heard (and seen)" (p. 18). Colbert, Trimble, and Desberg (1996) concluded that cases provide powerful means of learning through experiences. In their words, "Cases represent an interesting paradox in that they are deeply personal, evolving out of an individual's experiences, yet objective, in that they are designed to train teachers to function effectively in dealing with some of the most difficult problems they may face" (p. xiii).

Considering current demographic changes in today's schools, the interest in topics like the one addressed in this paper has increased and will continue to increase. I believe *good* schools

must be defined from the perspective of their willingness to create innovative ways of providing quality education for *all* students. Our traditional methods of solving problems in today's classrooms have not been very successful. Even teachers with "good hearts" do not know how to respond because of cultural incompetence, poor preparation, and unpreparation. Rigidity does not define *good* schools because it is frequently retrogressive. From my perspective, *quality* must go hand-in-glove with a *heart*; and how we manipulate classroom environments portrays the *goodness* of classrooms. My research and experience in the fields of general and special education have helped me in redefining *good* schools. While interacting with teachers and professionals through the years, I documented lots of cases in supposed *good* classrooms and schools. In more specific terms, my documentations have been based on my roles as (a) student, (b) teacher, (c) student-teaching supervisor, (d) teacher-observer, (e) classroom-based researcher, (f) teacher-educator, (g) parent, and (h) consultant. These experiences have helped me to see not just with my eyes but also with my "head" and "heart." I am convinced that because teachers teach from their personal experiences or cultural frames of reference, some of their methods may be misconstrued for "racism" even when they honestly believe they are helping students. However, the fact remains that they cannot teach what they do not know. Continuous education is definitely the key.

The "Good" School Phenomenon

Good schools must be where teachers have the courage to teach. In such schools, educational practitioners must believe in "quality with a heart" since quality without a heart is like a house without a roof. It is not surprising that some politicians are almost at war with teachers, and vice versa. Equally not surprising is the fact that some teachers are at war with

parents, and vice versa. Sadly, the construct "quality" has become the political watch-word for school reformers. Palmer (1998) observed:

> In our rush to reform education, we have forgotten a simple truth: reform will never be achieved by reviewing appropriations, restructuring schools, rewriting curricula, and revising tests if we continue to demean and dishearten the human resource called the teacher on whom so much depends. Teachers must be better compensated, freed from bureaucratic harassment, given a role in academic governance, and provided with the best possible methods and materials. But none of that will transform education if we fail to cherish and challenge the human heart that is the source of good teaching. (p. 3)

Teachers must put their hearts and souls into what they do. It is not enough for teachers to be knowledgeable; and it is not even enough that they teach in *good* schools. Additionally, it is not enough to know that these *good* schools are located in *good* neighborhoods where middle- to upper-class parents live. This myth of socioeconomic dissonance has currently defined our conception of *good* schools. Consider the recent school shootings and killings in many of our suburban and rural schools that have been consistently labeled as *good* schools. Should *good* schools not be where students are safe and where good teaching and learning take place? According to Palmer, "teaching and learning are critical to our individual and collective survival and to the quality of our lives. The pace of change has us snarled in complexities, confusions, and conflicts that will diminish us, or do us in, if we do not enlarge our capacity to teach and to learn" (p. 3). Can the capacities to teach and learn be expanded in environments where students' stressors are frequently swept under the rug as long as they maintained *good* grades or *good*

scores in standardized norm-referenced tests? Lovitt (2000), Obiakor, Darling, and Ford (2000), and Obiakor, Mehring, and Schwenn (1997) concluded that students' stressors impinge upon teaching and learning and that teachers and practitioners with *good* hearts minimize such stressors.

The "good" school phenomenon is alive and well! The critical question is, Can a school be a "good" school without a "good" principal or administrator? There is a tendency to view schools as *good* even when they have very "bad" principals or administrators. The ignorance of principals and school district administrators affects the "goodness" of their schools and teachers. Since "good" schools must respond to societal realities, the perceptions of principals and administrators about students, especially those who are minority and at risk should be taken seriously. Baer (1991) emphasized that:

> We need to understand who these kids are. They have potential; however, they don't know it. They need what we all have to offer, but they won't believe it. In a way, they may want to fail because there is a kind of comfort in that. After all, it's what they know best. Failure is a restful place to be. Nobody bothers them much because they can't be expected to give or participate . . . . The crucial point to remember is that in spite of all these obstacles, these kids have all the potential that other kids have. (p. 25)

As it appears, changing perceptions about people, events, and situations is painstaking. But for schools to be "good," teachers, principals, and administrators must leave their comfort zones. Consider Case 1, the case of Regina, the principal.

Case 1

> Regina was a White female who headed a "good" elementary school located in a "good" neighborhood. She had the reputation of being a "good" principal. She went on a vacation to the Dominican Republic in Latin America. When asked about how she enjoyed her trip, she expressed frustration on how she did not enjoy it because the Dominican people failed to speak English. According to her, "if we should go there to spend our money, they must speak our English language."

At first glance, Regina sounds like a proud American. However, another look at the big picture exposes a closed-minded person who has total disregard for other people's cultural and linguistic differences. The following pertinent questions should stimulate our thinking on our definition of a "good" school:

1. How can Regina work with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds or the parents of such students in her school?
2. How can Regina work with faculty or staff who come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds?
3. Since the laws now require Regina to be involved in the special education program of her students, what will her input be in the placement of a culturally and linguistically diverse student?
4. How can students, parents, faculty, and staff who come from different countries maximize their fullest potential in Regina's "good" school?

5. Even though Regina is known as a "good" principal, should she not be retrained to be aware of current demographic changes taking place in schools and communities?

Consider Case 2, the case of Charles, the superintendent.

Case 2

A county school district had the reputation of maintaining quality and excellence in its "good" schools. Charles, its superintendent (frequently regarded as a "good" superintendent), did not believe in desegregation or the inclusion of minority and exceptional learners in school programs. In fact, his district did not respond to federal laws meant to address segregation. To achieve this aim of "quality without equity," Charles hired very well-paid, high-powered attorneys who were bent on maintaining this phony meritocratic standard.

Again, at first glance, Charles sounds like a man who believed in quality. However, a deeper look at the picture reveals a man who refused to shift his paradigm with regard to racial and cultural valuing. The following pertinent questions should stimulate our thinking on our definition of "good" schools:

1. Does maintaining the status quo depict "goodness" all the time?
2. How can minority students be treated with respect in this district?
3. How can learners with exceptionalities maximize their fullest potential in this district?
4. Why should the money wasted on the attorneys not be invested in "good" programming for *all* students?

5. Even though Charles is known as a "good" superintendent, should he not be retrained to be aware of current demographic changes taking place in schools and communities?

As we redefine "good" schools, we must make sure that the perspectives of principals and administrators are not ignored. Again, it takes a *good* principal or *good* superintendent to develop a *good* school. We cannot downplay the impact of principals and school district administrators. As the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., pointed out:

> Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. Even a superficial look at history reveals that no social advance rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. Every step toward the good of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle, the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals. Without persistent effort, time itself becomes an allay of the insurgent and primitive forces of irrational emotionalism and social destruction. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action. (King, 1983, p. 59)

Quality, Equity, and "Good" Schools

We need *good* schools, and we also need *good* teachers to make our students *good* learners. But our paradigms must shift if we are truly going to reach *all* students. In the words of Palmer (1998):

> Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness, for better or worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul into my students, my subject, and our way of being together. The entanglements of experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life.

> Viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to the soul. If I am willing to look at that mirror and not run from what I see, I have a chance to gain self-knowledge—and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject. (p. 2)

Good schools should be where teachers and practitioners respond to cultural diversity. There is no doubt that cultural diversity enhances human relations. As Henderson and Bibers (1970) pointed out more than three decades ago:

> Human interactions in the classroom are generally of two types: teacher-student and student-student. The mood of the classroom is reflected in the words and behaviors of both the teachers and the students. Few educators would quarrel with the assumption that in order to minimize human relations problems in the classroom, skills related to identifying problems and finding their solutions should be taught to each student. All students should be able to distinguish between fact and opinion. Equally important, all students must be free to express their views. It is not enough to expose students to the opinions of "experts," they must be allowed to verbalize their opinions, no matter how "way out" they may seem. Much new understanding comes from hearing what others are saying. (p. 78)

Good schools should never be segregated environments where Blacks teach Blacks and Whites teach Whites. Such schools fail to prepare students for societal realities. Today, the sociocultural demography is changing, yet many students who come from different cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds become silenced invisible voices that get misidentified, misassessed, miscategorized, misplaced, and misinstructed (Banks, 1999; Ford,

Obiakor, & Patton, 1995; Grossman, 1998; Obiakor, 1994, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c; Obiakor et al., 1999; Obiakor & Utley, 1997). In urban, suburban, and rural schools, African American, Hispanic American, Asian American, and Native American students are now in schools with their Anglo American peers. These students can no longer be silenced invisible voices. Also, the access to technology has made the world smaller. While global competition has its own problems, global education is no more a far-fetched idea. Interestingly, with all the demographic changes taking place in schools today, the majority of the teachers remain Anglo Americans. As a consequence, the burden falls on these teachers to be prepared to work with these different students. It seems clear that there is a "cultural disconnect" between these teachers and their students. Additionally, it seems clear that they must be culturally responsive to reach their students(Obiakor, 2000; Obiakor & Utley; Obiakor & Williams, 2000; Trent, Obiakor, Ford, & Artiles, 2000; Utley, Delquadri, Obiakor, & Mims, 2000). For instance, Utley et al. emphasized that responding to cultural diversity should be a way of viewing how "good" schools are. Banks explained that not including culture in our interpretation of *good* schools projects a Utopian picture that is divorced from cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic realities of our nation in this new millennium. He reiterated that:

> Multicultural education is needed to help all of the nation's future citizens to acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to survive in the twenty-first century. Nothing less than the nation's survival is at stake. The rapid growth in the nation's population of people of color, the escalating importance of non-White nations such as China and Japan, and the widening gap between the rich and the poor make it essential for our future citizens to have multicultural literacy and

> cross-cultural skills. In the twenty-first century, a nation whose citizens cannot negotiate on the world's multicultural global stage will be tremendously disadvantaged, and its very survival may be imperiled. (p. 34)

Quality and equity must be integral parts of *good* schools. In other words, the education gained from *good* schools must have the power to enhance attitudes and intellectual sophistication (Dewey, 1958; Kohl, 1988). For instance, Dewey contended that:

> Education must have the tendency, if it is education to form attitudes. The tendency to form attitudes which will express themselves in intelligent social action is something very different from indoctrination . . . . There is an intermediary between aimless education and the education of inculcation and indoctrination. The alternative is the kind of education that connects the materials and methods by which knowledge is acquired with a sense of how things are done: not by impregnating the individual with some final philosophy, . . . but by enabling him (her) to so understand existing conditions that an attitude of intelligent action will follow from social understanding. (p. 56)

A logical extension is that social understandings are related to individual and societal valuing. Rather than devalue human beings, *good* schools must value the contributions of individuals to classroom and school cultures. *Good* schools therefore must be where individual beliefs, symbols, cultures, and languages are learned and incorporated into classroom daily functions. In other words, *good* schools and classrooms are not homogeneous environments that manifest exclusive practices divorced from individual and social freedoms. *Good* schools allow students to tell their stories. As Featherstone (1988) warned many years ago, "Unless we begin to hear

each other's stories, we'll keep walking around like strangers in an airport. And we will certainly not provide the young with the guidance they need to end up doing something worthwhile that suits them" (p. ix). He added that "the interaction of children's minds and feelings with the curriculum is the true locus of good teaching and good learning; any approach that stresses the child at the expense of content, or the curriculum at the expense of the child, is simply unsound" (p. xii). In a nutshell, quality and equity must go hand-in-glove for schooling to be "good."

Altruism, Realities, and "Good" Schools

In *good* schools, teachers are professionals who take their jobs seriously. By tradition, teachers face different realities, and they have roles and subroles that they must play to maximize the potential of their students. Redl and Wattenberg (1951) identified these roles and subroles to include (a) representatives of society (inculcates moral precepts), (b) judge (evaluates), (c) helper (provides guidance for students), (d) referee (manages crises), (e) role model (possesses traits students imitate), (f) group leader (establishes classroom climate), (g) parent surrogate (acts as a parent), (h) friend and confidante (establishes warm relationship with children and shares confidences), and (i) object of affection (meets psychological needs of students). While *good* teachers must be rewarded with merit pay and promotions, no amount of money can compensate teachers for what they do. Put another way, *good* teachers are like good priests and pastors who view their jobs spiritually and altruistically. Kohl (1988) noted that "the impulse to teach is fundamentally altruistic and represents a desire to share what you value and to empower others" (p. 7). He later added that:

> Wanting to teach is like wanting to have children or to write or paint or dance or invent or think through a mathematical problem that only a few have been able to

> solve. It has an element of mystery, involving as it does the yearly encounter with new people, the fear that you will be inadequate to meet their needs, as well as the rewards of seeing them become stronger because of your work. And as is true of the other creative challenges, the desire to teach and the ability to teach well are not the same thing. With the rarest of exceptions, one has to learn how to become a good teacher just as one has to learn how to become a scientist or an artist. (p. 16)

In many of our traditional *good* schools, some teachers seem to have forgotten that teaching is a profession. As a profession, it (a) performs an essential social service, (b) is founded upon a systematic body of knowledge, (c) requires a lengthy period of academic and practical training, (d) has a high degree of autonomy, (e) has a code of ethics, and (f) generates in-service growth (Hoyle, 1975). Surprisingly, some teachers in"good" schools do not (a) know who they are, (b) learn the facts when they are in doubt, (c) change their thinking, (d) build self-concepts, (e) use resource persons, (f) teach with divergent techniques, (g) make the right choices, and (h) continue to learn (Obiakor, 1994). Rather, some of these teachers have politicized their professional activities. Some have stopped learning, and as a result, have refused to shift their paradigms. Following are questions that are critical to understanding what "good" schools entail:

1. Should *good* schools not be where good teaching involves positivism, flexibility, adaptability, sensitivity, and open-mindedness?
2. Should *good* schools not be where cultural, racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic heterogeneity reflect social realities?

3. Should *good* schools not be where student stressors and individual differences are responded to?
4. Should *good* schools not be where issues of student learning styles and multiple intelligences are addressed?
5. Should *good* schools not be where culturally diverse student, faculty, and staff populations are dedicated to excellence?
6. Should *good* schools not be where *all* students are encouraged to maximize their fullest potential?
7. Should *good* schools not be where parents and community members are empowered?
8. Should *good* schools not be where parents and teachers work collaboratively, consultatively, and cooperatively, despite their cultural, racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic differences?
9. Should *good* schools not be where students are educated for life and not suspended or expelled indiscriminately?
10. Should *good* schools not be where students are prepared to be responsible and productive citizens through self-knowledge, self-esteem, and self-empowerment?
11. Should *good* schools not be where students are prepared to be nationally and globally aware?
12. Should *good* schools not be where students' freedoms are maximized?
13. Should *good* schools not be where teachers foster human relations?

14. Should *good* schools not be where quality is incorporated with a "heart?"
15. Should *good* schools not be where student identification, assessment, placement, and instruction are nonrestrictive and nondiscriminatory?
16. Should *good* schools not be where communications flourish and different voices are heard?

Beyond Traditional "Good" Schools

On the whole, the undergirding spirit in *good* schools must be to prepare students for life's perfections and imperfections. Consider situations present in Cases 3–5, three traditional "good" schools (Schools A, B, and C).

Case 3

School A was an elementary school in an Midwestern city and was a laboratory school that was attached to a university. As a laboratory school, preservice teachers were prepared in their field and practical experiences in this school. Interestingly, this school has failed twice in its quest to be a Charter School because of its lack of diversity in student, faculty, and staff populations. School A had mostly Anglo American students, faculty, and staff, and there was visible homogeneity in cultural, racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. In this school, cultural diversity or multicultural education was not infused in the general curricula. In fact, classes were held on the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday. Also in this school, nobody had a visible physical disability, but some students took ritalin because of attention deficit disorders. Fewer than 10 students were identified as having learning disabilities, especially in reading (i.e.,

dyslexia). School A's buildings were well-taken care of, and classroom materials were readily available. In this school, there was zero tolerance for indiscipline, and students were easily punished and suspended without due process hearings or parental consent. There was a semi-alternative program for students with serious emotional disturbance located in the school's basement; however, this school tried to dissociate itself from this alternative program. Generally, teachers, administrators, and parents were happy that they produced students who made *good* grades and high scores on standardized norm-referenced tests.

Case 4

School B was a suburban elementary school that was culturally, racially, and socioeconomically homogeneous. However, some minority students were bussed from the city schools to respond to the issue of desegregation. School B had majority Anglo American teachers, staff, service providers, parents, and students. It also had one African American male who was the physical education teacher and an African American female who was a permanent substitute teacher. Fewer than 10 minority students who came from middle- to upper-class homes attended this school from their suburban homes. Some students had learning disabilities, and a few of them were given ritalin to deal with attention deficit disorders. In this school, there were a couple of students with visible mental or physical disabilities. There was also a zero tolerance for indiscipline; however, the principal believed in parental involvement in students' daily activities. In this school, the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday and Black History Month were

observed. Cultural diversity was sometimes infused, but the lack of training of faculty and staff in this area seemed to create teacher-parent consultation and collaboration problems. School B prided itself on maintaining high students' scores on standardized tests, and parents and community members were proud of the school's reputation.

Case 5

School C (frequently regarded as a "good" school) was a rural elementary school known for its belief in quality and excellence. It was culturally, racially, and socioeconomically homogeneous. However, it had a couple of students whose parents were migrant workers and those who worked in the beef factories. A handful of these students spoke little English (i.e., they were linguistically different). Because of this linguistic difference, they were put in special education programs. School C had many interesting policies. Examples include (a) when students did not finish their work, they forfeited their recess periods; (b) when students finished all their work, they had *fun time*; and those who were unable to finish were denied such fun time; (c) when students were tardy or absent, they were suspended; and if such tardiness continued, they were automatically expelled; (d) parental due process was not a top priority since parents were not allowed to infringe on school regulations; and (e) students were consistently tested to see if they had special education problems that will lead to early intervention and placement. In School C, cultural diversity was not an issue since it never tried to address it—the focus was on student assimilation. Students from

migrant families had no choice but to attend School C—it was the only one around. The other students (i.e., majority Anglo Americans) performed very well in standardized norm-referenced tests. School C focused solely on the 3 Rs (reading, writing, and arithmetic) and self-concept development activities were viewed as activities that "watered down" the curriculum. School C was popular in this school district.

It appears that Schools A, B, and C are typical *good* schools across the nation. Expectedly, we interpret their "goodness" on the basis of their students' performance on external exams. When we evaluate such schools, we manifest a pervasive Puritanic mentality. We expect our schools to be perfect, our parents to be perfect, and our students to be perfect, notwithstanding life's imperfections. Yet, we frequently forget that students, parents, and teachers are human elements of our imperfect society, and as a result, our Puritanic expectations seem very unrealistic. A few years ago, O'Brien (1991) confirmed that "parents trying to raise respectful children today, unfortunately, have to do it in a disrespectful world. Brutal and hostile acts are shown in nightly television; profane, vulgar and irreverent language is used routinely in the media; greed and selfishness are revealed in important and prominent people; role models are too outrageous or too perfect to be taken seriously" (p. 183).

The critical question is, How realistic are our "good" schools in addressing cultural, linguistic, and social demographics evident in the new millennium? School reform programs must emphasize quality and excellence; however, they need to also emphasize equity at all levels to present the kinds of realities that face students outside the school. Today's students deserve truly *good* schools because in such schools we have truly *good* teachers who (a) build their

knowledge base, (b) examine the classroom culture, (c) plan and deliver classroom instruction, (d) negotiate the roles of teaching, (e) build self-concepts through self-efficacy, (f) restructure learning and work environments, (g) enhance learning with technologies and resources, (h) work beyond the classroom, and (i) shift paradigms in what they do (Obiakor, Karr, Utley, & Algozzine, 1998). In addition, our nation needs truly *good* teachers who are willing to meet their pedagogical challenges in today's classrooms by:

1. Saying what they mean and meaning what they say.
2. Using time effectively and efficiently.
3. Using information to indicate and create interest.
4. Adopting and modifying instruction to respond to individual differences.
5. Responding to cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic differences.
6. Teaching students to think.
7. Making school fun.
8. Making every student a winner.
9. Evaluating student performance appropriately.
10. Helping every child to maximize his/her potential.
11. Communicating properly with students, parents, and colleagues.
12. Motivating their students toward self-responsibility.
13. Rewarding their students.
14. Mastering the art of questioning.
15. Managing their classrooms.

Perspective

In this paper, I have challenged our ideas about "good" schools, and to a large measure, have dealt with specific classroom issues rarely addressed in an in-depth fashion. It is important that we begin to redefine what *good* schools and *good* classrooms mean if we will survive as a society and nation. My premise is that many of our *good* schools cannot survive external scrutiny when evaluated from multidimensional perspectives. We need schools to practically manifest human realities—our definitions of *good* schools have been perceptually based and suffer from the problems that they are supposed to solve. Our *good* schools must respond to excellence and quality, but they must also respond to culture and socioeconomics. In the end, our *good* schools must be where teachers, principals, and administrators are prepared to move beyond tradition to expose *all* students to life's realities. Such a courageous move must be courageously supported by those who prepare teachers to be "good" through preservice and inservice trainings. We must have the courage to change from retrogressive traditionalism to progressive traditionalism. Just as we must honor our culture, we must also honor the world in which our culture exists. As Palmer (1998) concluded:

> Teachers who use nontraditional methods feel thwarted by the traditionalism of their students, their students' parents, and some of their colleagues: "Stop doing the 'touchy-feely' stuff with students. Cover the field, make them memorize the facts, and show them how to compete. If you don't, you put them at disadvantage in the real world of work" . . . . The irony is clear: the"real" world of work is the source of much pedagogical experimentation and change, precisely because conventional top-down teaching does not prepare students well for the realities of

that world. But some students, some parents, and some academics are caught in a cultural lag. They need to hear the news. (pp. 178–179)

References

Baer, G. L. (1991). *Turning our at-risk kids around.* Monrovia, NY: Chronicle Guidance Publications.

Banks, J. (1999). *An introduction to multicultural education* (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Colbert, J. A., Trimble, K., & Desberg, P. (1996). *The case for education: Contemporary approaches for using case methods.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Denzin, N. K. (1995). The experiential text and the limits of visual understanding. *Educational Theory, 45*, 7–18.

Dewey, J. (1958). *Philosophy of education.* Ames, IA: Littlefield, Adams, & Co.

Ford, B. A., Obiakor, F. E., & Patton, J. M. (1995). *Effective education of African American exceptional learners: New perspectives.* Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

Grossman, H. (1998). *Ending discrimination in special education.* Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

Featherstone, J. (1988). Foreword. In H. Kohl, *Growing minds: On becoming a teacher* (pp. ix–xviii). New York: Harper Touchbooks.

Henderson, G., & Bibens, R. F. (1970). *Teachers should care: Social perspectives of teaching.* New York: Harper & Row.

Hoyle, E. (1975). *The role of the teacher.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

King, C. S. (1983). *The words of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: New Market Press.

Kohl, H. (1988). *Growing minds: On becoming a teacher*. New York :Harper Touchbooks.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lovitt, T. (2000). *Preventing school failure: Tactics for teaching adolescents* (2nd ed.). Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

Obiakor, F. E. (1994). *The eight-step multicultural approach: Learning and teaching with a smile*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

Obiakor, F. E. (1999a). *Beyond the steps: Multicultural study guide*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

Obiakor, F. E. (1999b). Multicultural education: Powerful tool for educating learners with exceptionalities. In F. E. Obiakor, J. O. Schwenn, & A. F. Rotatori (Eds.), *Advances in special education: Multicultural education for learners with exceptionalities* (pp. 1–14). Stamford, CT: JAI Press.

Obiakor, F. E. (1999c). Teacher expectations of minority exceptional learners: Impact on "accuracy" of self-concepts. *Exceptional Children, 66*, 39–55.

Obiakor, F. E. (2000, April). *Infusing multicultural models in teacher education programs: Vision for the new millennium*. Paper presented at the International Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children, Vancouver, BC, Canada.

Obiakor, F. E., Darling, S., & Ford, B. A. (2000, April). *Managing crises of suburban students: what general and special educators must know*. Program Chair Invited Session

presented at the International Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children, Vancouver, BC, Canada.

Obiakor, F. E., Karr, S., Utley, C., & Algozzine, B. (1988). The requirements and demands of being an educator. In R. J. Anderson, C. E. Keller, & J. M. Karp (Eds), *Enhancing diversity: Educators with disabilities* (pp. 142–154). Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.

Obiakor, F. E., Mehring, T. A., & Schwenn, J. O. (1997). *Disruption, disaster, and death: Helping students deal with crises*. Reston, VA: The Council for Exceptional Children.

Obiakor, F. E., Schwenn, J. D., & Rotatori, A. F. (1999). *Advances in special education: Multicultural education for learners with exceptionalities*. Stamford, CT: JAI Press.

Obiakor, F. E., & Utley, C. A. (1997). Rethinking preservice preparation for teachers in the learning disabilities field: Workable multicultural strategies. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 12*, 100–106.

Obiakor, F. E., & Williams, D. (2000, March). *Using cases to infuse multicultural models in teacher preparation programs: Vision for the new millennium.* Paper presented at the 12th Annual School of Education Research Conference, University of Wisconsin– Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI.

O'Brien, S. J. (1991, Spring). How do you raise respectful children in a disrespectful world? *Childhood Education*, pp. 183–184.

Palmer, P. J. (1998). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Redl, F., & Wattenberg, W. (1951). *Mental hygiene in teaching.* New York: Harcourt, Brace.

Trent, S. C., Obiakor, F. E., Ford, B. A., & Artiles, A. J. (2000, April). *Educating minority exceptional learners in the new millennium.* Preconvention workshop presented at the International Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children, Vancouver, BC, Canada.

Utley, C. A., Delquadri, J. C., Obiakor, F. E., & Mims, V. (2000, Winter). General and special educators' perceptions of teaching strategies for culturally and linguistically diverse students. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 23*, 34–50.

West, C. (1993). *Race matters.* New York: Vintage Books.